

37963

IDRC-Lib  
37963

NOTES FOR REMARKS BY  
IVAN L. HEAD  
TO IDCJ-UNICEF SEMINAR ON THE  
SOCIAL DIMENSION OF DEVELOPMENT  
TOKYO, JAPAN  
1 November, 1979

---



In any society, developing or industrialized, social elements are difficult to quantify; they resist statistical analysis. Yet they, much more than the economic, reflect the soul of a community. And, in the final analysis, they determine the success or failure of developmental efforts.

When I refer to social elements I do not have in mind the numbers of schools or hospitals which a community boasts. I refer to the possession, by a community, of the sense of organization, the discipline to contribute, the competence to engage in problem-solving activities. These factors are architectural in nature. In their absence, assistance from without is non-cumulative in effect. Without them, development in its fullest sense is non-sustaining.

From his earliest origins, man has been a social creature: organizing, coordinating, cooperating, competing. For millennia, those organizational efforts concentrated on

economic activities, primarily agricultural or food producing. Even today many of the great festivals celebrated in various parts of the world are timed to coincide with significant seasonal events - seeding, harvesting, or the cyclical activities of game fish and animals. Many, of course, reflect as well religious elements. They are social in their structure, however, and represent the human-relations dimension of the community.

Anthropologists vary in their estimates of the origins of communal organization. Historians are more certain in the dates they assign to specific social accomplishments such as the conclusion of nomadic practices and the commencement of fixed agriculture activity. As centuries have passed, the nature of community organization has changed, and so has the concept of community. Village, city-state, empire, nation-state, federation - all have ebbed and flowed. Historians of the future may well mark the era in which we live as the beginning of a new dimension of community: one of global proportions, one requiring global attitudes and demanding a global ethic. "Spaceship Earth" Barbara Ward called it. "The Global Village" wrote Marshal McLuhan.

A community confers privileges on its members. It also assigns responsibilities. It assumes standards and reflects values. The community is a fabric of many fibres. Its success, indeed its survival, depends upon its ability to contribute to the

welfare of its members. Its goal and its measure is the enhancement of the dignity of human beings. The means by which it does this vary from time to time and place to place. There is no single formula nor universal catalogue of ingredients. The elements range among political, technological, legal, economic, social. And each assumes many sub-species. If the mix is not well-proportioned, aberrations appear. Political instability. Military rivalry. Economic disparity. Because the members of the community are suffering, the community suffers.

Accordingly, all members of the international community participating in the developmental process share responsibility to ensure that their activities do not contribute to imbalance and aberration - consciously or unconsciously.

For more than a quarter century developmental emphasis has been given to economic growth. The goals of each of the first and second U.N. development decades have been set in economic terms. Economic indicators presume to assess the health of nations. Economic statistics are employed to measure the progress of countries and regions. Gross national product is the temple at which politicians worship.

Absent economic health, of course, there is unlikely to be community health. The presence of economic growth in unrefined or imbalanced form, however, detracts from that health rather than contributes to it.

In that same 25 year period the world has witnessed emphasis of a related sort - emphasis on specialization. As technology has become more and more complex, the sectors of concentration have grown more and more narrow in field after field and discipline after discipline.

Equilibrium and balance become increasingly elusive in these circumstances. Seldom now is there a loss of a nail for which a battle is lost but we are all aware of numerous incidents in which the loss of a spark-plug has led to the breakdown of a machine, the absence of an approach road caused the abandonment of a bridge, the failure of a component in a market system prompted the wastage of a crop.

Development goals which emphasize social dimensions, and development strategies which cater to the entire social structure, are desperately needed in order to ensure that no single component in the social system leads to the failure of others.

## II

Since the conclusion of the Pacific War, the world has been engaged in a mix of political evolution and revolution quite unprecedented in history. The number of independent states, as measured by membership in the U.N., has tripled. In an extraordinary period, hundreds of millions of persons have passed from a colonial status to one of political self-rule. The transition in some instances has been the forerunner of political stability. Often it has not. Seldom has independence brought with it economic buoyancy and even more rarely has there been satisfied the rising expectations of social well-being.

Contemporaneous with this sequence of political revolution and evolution has been another revolution, one which in terms of impact is of even greater scope. This revolution is scientific and technological in nature. It has made obsolete previous concepts of transportation and communication; it has influenced in overwhelming fashion the design and disposition of weapons systems; it has made possible undreamed of increases in agricultural productivity; it has contributed to the reorganization of human endeavour with solid state electronic components and micro-processing techniques. It has done little, however, to remedy the imbalance between rich and poor persons.

The combination of these influences and events has created the world of 1979 - a world of unprecedented expectations, of explosive increases in population, of political competition and economic disparity, of ecological deterioration and military threat.

And withal, we forget at our peril that technology has produced no substitute for reasoned judgement.

### III

What, then, is the role of the industrialized nations in the process of social development? First of all, perhaps, it is to take care not to project the wrong images; not to assume that the northern experience is either valid as a model for the south or that it is transferable. Neither premise is valid. Unfortunately many development assistance programs have operated in the past on the assumption that they are. Sometimes with tragic results. Iran is one.

Paul Freund vividly described history as a tension between heritage and heresy. If the development process contributes to that tension, and if the strength of the social fabric is unable to withstand the strain, there is a rupture.

In any rupture, the task of identifying the elements and diagnosing the causes becomes critical lest they prove communicable and destructive of other societies. The Iranian evidence is far from assembled, yet the importance of the case to the international community is such that the examination cannot long be delayed. Especially is the tragedy of Iran important to those of us dedicated to the cause of development, for it may prove, in development terms, to be a classic case of faulty design and mismanagement, of failure to take account of social dimensions.

Heritage and heresy are far removed from one another in the Iranian social fabric. One element of heritage is the Bakhtiari, a nomadic group that has not altered its pattern of life since the retreat of the last ice age some 12,000 years ago; a group that carries with it all its possessions as it crosses six perilous mountain ranges annually in its outward quest for fresh pastures, then crosses the same six ranges again on return, packing and un-packing each day of the year. Of them, Bronowski writes: "There is no room for innovation, because there is not time, on the move, between evening and morning, coming and going all their lives, to develop a new device or a new thought - not even a new tune. The only habits that survive are the old habits. The only ambition of the son

is to be like the father."

At the other end of the Iranian fabric, 12,000 years more modern, heresy takes the form of such devices as the F-14 and the Phoenix missile system. The strain imposed by the rapid introduction of this heresy into a society influenced so heavily by ancient heritage proved unbearable. Rupture and anarchy were the immediate consequences. Confusion and oscillating tendencies will continue for some time.

If the primary stress factor in this rupture was the introduction of developmental programs, what was the nature of the error? For two decades it has been widely accepted that the absence of development is destabilizing, that the disparity between rich and poor across national lines or within them could not be tolerated indefinitely. Paul VI had so implied when he stated some years ago that "the new name for peace is development." Willy Brandt just a few months ago identified development as "the most important social problem for the balance of this century." Was, then, the situation in Iran an anomalous one? Was the loss of stability occasioned by the presence of development? Let me attempt a preliminary analysis.



There were four major ingredients which contributed to the widespread unrest in Iran, cumulatively more pervasive and influential than hostility towards the Shah's repressive and autocratic methods and measures. Each of the four was development-related.

- (i) Development emphasis was placed on industrialization, much of it of a military nature, to the almost total neglect of agriculture.
- (ii) The benefits of the developmental process fell unevenly among the several social groups in Iran, increasing rather than decreasing economic disparity.
- (iii) There was inadequate preparation for the social impact of rapid economic change.
- (iv) The presence in large numbers of foreigners, many of them seemingly in influential positions, gave to Iranians the impression that their country had passed into the control of outsiders.

The cumulative effect of these factors took the form

of immense popular disaffection. Fueled with this volatile mixture, religion proved to be an available vehicle. The Shah was the obvious focus as the pendulum swung back toward heritage even at the immediate expense of many legal and economic reforms.

If this analysis bears up under close scrutiny, there are many lessons to be observed by all participants in the North-South dialogue, by all those in any way involved with international development.

#### IV

Among the lessons, there are three which bear continuing emphasis. All relate to image projection. All, in one way or another, are inter-linked.

The first is the impact which results from the imposition of alien cultural models. The importation of northern (sometimes called "western") lifestyles commenced centuries ago and found flourishing root in the colonial era. Political independence in many instances has increased the phenomenon rather than the reverse. The danger often lies not so much in the model as in the violence

to the local custom which is so frequently a result of its emulation. One striking example is in the field of health care.

Western delivery systems, with their emphasis on expensive, curative, facilities have been held out for decades as models of modern accomplishment. The elites of the developing countries insist upon the acquisition of expensive hospitals, equipped with technological gadgetry of incredible complexity and overwhelming cost. Professional medical staffs absorb western attitudes in their training and often refuse, or are ill-prepared, to practice in rural areas. In some regions of the world - West Africa is an example - traditional healers and their techniques have been reviled and often driven underground. Today, the financial burden of the maintenance in major cities of hospitals and clinics, designed to cater to only a few, absorbs the overwhelming majority of the health budgets of entire countries.

The damage done to national health services by this pressure is revealed by WHO estimates that the health budget of every developing country, if equitably divided, is sufficient to provide rudimentary, but adequate, health care to the entire

population. Yet virtually no country in the developing world organizes itself that way. In the result the great mass of the people suffer. Sophisticated hospitals in the cities; the absence of even drinking water and latrines in the countryside.

The second lesson is compounded by the first. It is the increasing gap growing between the privileged and the non-privileged in developing countries, most dramatically illustrated by the disparity in living standards between the elites in the cities and the poor in the rural areas. The distribution of incomes is badly skewed and with the imbalance there grows an ever widening gulf between the quantity and quality of goods and services at the disposition of either end of the income scale. The difference in standard of life between these two groups within developing countries exceeds any differences overall between industrialized and developing nations. It represents an explosive threat to political stability and orderly processes. Without a concerted effort to introduce a greater component of social justice into these environments as well as into the international environment, there is little likelihood that any developmental processes will succeed.

Indeed the image of the cities as a fountainhead of the good life has created a situation which serves as lesson number three - the accelerating concentration of populations in the urban areas. The World Bank estimates that in the final quarter of this century the number of people living in the cities and towns of the developing countries will increase by nearly a billion. This will lead to an immense concentration of urban dwellers in large cities. By the year 2000 the Bank projects that some 40 cities in the developing countries will exceed 5 million people in size, with 18 of them likely larger than 10 million, a frightening prospect.

The trend has been evident for several decades. In Africa the populations of some cities have increased ten-fold, thirty-fold, even fifty-fold, in a period of thirty years. Today the misery of the shanty suburbs of the major cities is the most shocking and scandalous social problem of the third world. Millions of persons live there in a rural-urban vacuum, distant from the social structures to which they have been accustomed, denied the social services which cities normally promise.

V

What circumstances have led to these development aberrations? And what adjustments are required in order to eliminate them? The diagnosis may be easier than the prescription.

From country to country throughout the developing regions there was little preparation for the phenomenal pressures which have come from the desire to "modernize". In relative terms some regions were better off than others; India, for example, was home at the time of independence to a large cadre of well-educated public servants, scientists and teachers. By contrast, Zaire at independence had only 7 university graduates. Everywhere, there was a dearth of indigenous research competence, and what little research was engaged in was dedicated in large measure to the production of agricultural products destined for export - rubber, bananas, coffee, cocoa, sisal. Virtually no research was engaged in for local food crops such as rice, sorghum, cassava, millets, or to the other problems and needs of the local communities.

Of equal importance, there was inadequate education among much of the population to permit people to understand and cope with many of the most basic of problems. Education, as one

example, is regarded as the key element in health. Awareness of simple rules of hygiene, of sanitation, of nutrition, of disease transmission, are crucial to any effective health care system. Yet for hundreds of millions of persons in the developing countries this awareness is absent. If a mother is not concerned about endemic diarrhea in her children because she believes that this is a normal condition, it is difficult to encourage her to adopt new household habits or to treat soundly her child.

Knowledge of some of the simplest farming facts is often absent, even among traditional farming communities. IRRI, the International Rice Research Institute, estimates that the world's annual rice yield per crop is 1.8 tonnes per hectare. Without any change in seed, and with no additions of fertilizers, water, insecticides or pesticides, but only the application of sound husbandry of the soil - ploughing, weeding, etc. - that yield could increase to 3 tonnes per hectare. An increase of 67% with absolutely no expenditure of additional funds or resources.

It is axiomatic that in any country, industrialized or developing, the most valuable resource is the people. A well-educated, healthy labour force is a condition precedent to

an innovative, productive economy. But measures designed to deal only with a single developmental problem, or a single facet of a problem, have introduced fresh aberrations which have led to frustration and disenchantment. Without a broad view of the developmental process, and without adequate attention to social as well as economic issues, successful policies are unlikely.

Illustration - For 200 million people in South-East Asia, the most popular fish, and most important protein source, is milkfish. This species is widely raised in captivity, but will not spawn except in the wild. Since the days of Magellan, milkfish fry have been captured in the ocean and transferred to ponds and tanks to be fed and groomed for market. Work now underway at the South-East Asian Fisheries Development Centre has led to a remarkable biological breakthrough - spawning under controlled conditions. This accomplishment will guarantee a year-round supply of fish adequate for the demand, removing seasonal fluctuations and consequent variations in price. In terms both of supply and price, an admirable goal. Yet there is a downside. A successful domestic breeding program will deprive those who now catch the fry - an estimated 170,000 in the Philippines



alone - of their means of livelihood. Clearly the introduction of such a program must be accompanied by some means of ensuring alternate employment for those affected. A social program will be necessary.

Illustration - Income disparity within developing countries is a distressing phenomenon. Some system of income redistribution through taxing or other techniques, as has long been practical in the industrialized countries, is clearly desirable. Even a marginally wealthier low-income class will be better able to cater to its basic needs. Again, an admirable goal. Yet research reveals that a shift of income will not prompt an equal shift in the consumption of goods and services. Why? Because of a variation in consumption patterns.

It is now demonstrably evident, for example, that the poor spend the bulk of any increment to their income on food. In India, for example, those persons in the lowest 20 per cent of the income scale spend 60 per cent of any income increment on food grains, and 85 to 90 per cent on food and agricultural commodities in total. In sharp contrast, those persons in

the top 10 per cent of the income scale spend only 5 per cent of any income increment on grain and only 35 per cent on all food and agricultural commodities. Thus one dollar of income removed from the rich will reduce demand for grain by only 5 cents. Given to the poor, however, that same dollar will increase the demand for grain by 60 cents. A policy of balanced income redistribution which shifts a dollar from rich to poor will raise food demand by the poor twelve times as much as it lowers food demand by the rich. According to studies done by the International Food Policy Research Institute, this pattern holds broadly true throughout the Third World. What this means is that any increase in per capita income of the poor in developing countries will require an immense increase in food production.

In the first of the two illustrations, an effort to increase food production requires a complementary social policy. In the second illustration a change in social policy requires a major increase in food production. Striking evidence of the inextricable interplay of social and economic factors and of the necessity for governments always to ensure that each remains complementary to the other.

VI

It is perhaps not surprising that the social dimension in development has for so long been paid inadequate attention. After all, man has been engaged in military activity for millennia yet it was not until the 19th century that a social dimension was first included in military strategy. The man who did so - Clausewitz - has been renowned ever since.

There is no single person who can claim credit for drawing attention to the social side of development. It has not been until recently, however, when emphasis has been placed on meeting basic human needs, that the focus of developmental concern has switched from major infrastructure and industrial strategies to those more immediately and intimately involved with people. The current international goal, spearheaded by the World Bank, of eliminating worldwide the worst aspects of poverty by the turn of the century, draws attention to the "people-sized" programs devoted to health, nutrition, shelter and education. These, in large measure, are elements of social activity. They complement the wider focus of concentration on the creation of a new international economic order. Together,

these components will undoubtedly comprise much of the structure of the International Development Strategy which will guide the efforts of the international community throughout the Third Development Decade. That decade commences in 1980 with a Special Session of the General Assembly.

If well formulated and clearly enunciated, the IDS should make more understandable to the populations of the industrialized countries, and more acceptable to the governments of the developing countries, international development policies. The primary beneficiaries of development will be identified - the people of the developing countries, essentially the children. The equitable goals will be highlighted - the reduction of economic disparities between countries and within them. Development assistance may then more broadly be understood not as a charitable endeavour - pursued only when the wealthy are economically encouraged or morally stimulated - but as an activity of vital importance to all nations.

The fate of all human beings is now inextricably interrelated; the economies of north and south are demonstrably interdependent. Political stability, economic activity and cultural accomplishment are all held hostage by poverty and harsh

inequities which deny human dignity. So are the likelihood of sound environmental practices, the reduction of the threat of infectious disease epidemics, and more equitable access to both resources and markets. So, too, is physical security. Robert McNamara wrote last spring: "... unless there is visible progress towards a solution (of LDC poverty) we shall not have a peaceful world. We cannot build a secure world upon a foundation of human misery."

Development, as we know, is costly (but only a fraction of the cost of military preparedness). Development, as we also know, is extraordinarily complex, largely because that is the nature of the human animal. Thus the critical role of social policies in development strategies. Social policies, well designed, enhance both the life-style and the capacity of a country's human resources.

Human competence, in order to be self-sustaining, must be indigenous. Unfortunately, experience in years past has shown that all too seldom is that result achieved. The common practice in many sectors of relying on a combination of "experts" from the north and "counterparts" from the south has not been consistently fruitful. Knowledge and expertise have

not been transferred in an effective fashion. In other instances the knowledge has not been relevant to the peculiar circumstances of the developing countries and rejection has been the result. Still another shortcoming has been the inevitable inclination of so many members of the early generations of developing country experts to employ their knowledge and skills in urban settings, often catering to the expressed needs and wishes of elite groups. Not surprisingly, there has been little "trickle-down" effect to the rural regions and to the local communities.

In the result, after three decades of development (using as the measuring point the commencement of the Colombo Plan), a large number of well-trained people are in place in a wide range of countries - in universities, in research institutes, in government ministries - but the quality of professional competence at the level of the local officer has remained largely unchanged. The plight of the rural dweller and the villager has been influenced little.

The sort of human resources development needed to overcome these deficiencies will not easily be accomplished. It is much less difficult for the donor agencies of the north

as well as for the governments of the south to deal with the macro issues in a metropolitan setting. For outsiders it is much simpler to deal with the central government ministries or with the major university in the capital city than it is to reach into the rural areas and come to grips there with some long-neglected problems. For all-too-many developing country governments the weakness of their own administrative machinery makes it next to impossible for them to absorb funding and technical assistance dedicated to the countryside. Persistent efforts by donor agencies to transfer their priorities from the urban areas to the rural poor have in many instances encountered animosity and charges of intervention from national governments. At a recent high-level international conference on health, the experience of many of the major donor governments and agencies was identical: their efforts to encourage a switch in focus from urban curative facilities to rural preventive systems had been met almost universally with indifference if not hostility.

This follows from one of the facts of life in developing countries: the concentration of political power in the urban elites. It is to the needs of these groups that governments,

understandably if unfortunately, attach priority. The circumstances are not dissimilar from those existing in England prior to the passage of the Reform Act. The disenfranchised there were beyond the sympathetic reach of government. The poor, the needy, the landless, possessed no political power, and enjoyed no political benefits. One hundred years later, increased activity in social development in developing countries will not be easy. Any strategy to deal with rural universities and village authorities will be much more labour intensive and all the while unlikely to attract much enthusiasm. Yet certain steps can be taken. More assistance in the form of training fellowships can be designed to attract and benefit the mid-career professional. More of these same fellowships can be offered to rural and regional officials, teachers and researchers. And more training programs can be sited in comparable facilities in the industrialized countries permitting candidates to work in an environment and with persons holding responsibilities similar to those from which they have come.

More important than any of these steps, however, is the image of their own values which the industrialized countries project abroad. If these continue to emphasize material affluence



and economic gain as the supreme goal, if they project urban life as the most desirable, if they appear to encourage the accumulation of personal comfort at the expense of the disadvantaged, then it is unlikely that modern and moderate developing country regimes can promote policies which contain major variations. The life-style and the value-system of we who live in the north is a vital, perhaps critical, component.

## VII

It is possible that the social dimension of development has not been given adequate weight because the development process itself has escaped most attempts to define it. If a definition of development were to include some reference to the ability of an individual to influence his environment, his destiny, and his life-style, and if it reflected as well some sense of the expression of talent and the pursuit of happiness, then the social factor could not be overlooked. Development would then be understood for what it is, a social imperative.

Between north and south there now exists a developmental divide. Its existence is re-emphasized in every session of the

General Assembly and in virtually every inter-governmental conference, be it UNCTAD, UNCSTD or the assemblies of the U.N. specialized agencies. In no other direction and over no other issue does there exist such a definite and seemingly insurmountable barrier.

More significant perhaps than the failure of governments to reach agreement across the divide is the popular mood of indifference now so prevalent in the north and the sense of frustration now so evident in the south. Within the industrialized countries, taxpayers ask if the resources which they have transferred have been effective in raising living standards in the developing countries. The answer given them appears all too often to be in the negative. Coincidentally, agitators and dissidents in the developing countries foment unrest and disaffection toward the regimes in power among those who have not shared in the influx of developmental assistance.

To penetrate the developmental divide, there is required a measure of human involvement in the north and a measure of human benefit in the south. In short, a perception of the human condition much more intimate and much more subjective

than is found in macro-economic treatises.

Should we fail in both north and south to recognize the social incentives to development, we shall be adding to the schism. We shall be contributing to human tragedy on a global scale.